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28 July 1972

Mr. B. Brooks Thomas  
Vice President and General Counsel  
Harper & Row, Publisher, Inc.  
10 East 53rd Street  
New York, New York 10022

Dear Mr. Thomas:

Pursuant to our agreement, we have reviewed Alfred W. McCoy's book, The Politics of Heroin in Southeast Asia. A complete and detailed review and analysis would take weeks, but I believe we have been able to identify enough important aspects to bear out our original concern as to the statements it might make about CIA.

The theme of Mr. McCoy's book is contained on page 8: "Unlike some national intelligence agencies, the CIA did not dabble in the drug traffic to finance its clandestine operations. Nor was its culpability the work of a few corrupt agents, eager to share in the enormous profits. The CIA's role in the heroin traffic was simply an inadvertent but inevitable consequence of its cold war tactics." His theme is further spelled out on page 14, where he says: "American diplomats and secret agents have been involved in the narcotics traffic at three levels: (1) coincidental complicity by allying with groups actively engaged in the drug traffic; (2) abetting the traffic by covering up for known heroin traffickers and condoning their involvement; (3) and active engagement in the transport of opium and heroin. It is ironic, to say the least, that America's heroin plague is of its own making."

CIA's position can be simply stated as follows:

a. The opium trade has existed in Southeast Asia for generations. This trade depended upon the market, and until recently the market for Southeast Asian opium was in Southeast Asia. The increase in the opium trade and the appearance of heroin were a result of the increased market, in part due to the presence of large American military forces in Vietnam.

b. CIA at no time allied with, abetted or engaged in the drug trade in Southeast Asia. From its earliest days in Southeast Asia, CIA took steps to ensure that it would not be involved in the drug trade.

c. When this drug trade became a matter of concern to Americans, as distinct from a local Southeast Asian problem, CIA engaged in a variety of programs to attack it. These efforts are by no means totally successful, but they have had substantial impact.

Mr. McCoy supports his theme by citing a large number of allegations, assertions, and interpretations. From an examination of these, it is plain that Mr. McCoy has limited his citations to those supporting his thesis, and he appears to have ignored available information which might contradict it. In the unsettled, and in many areas primitive, circumstances of Southeast Asia, rumors and unsupported assertions are common, and the first requirement of serious intelligence operations, scholarly research or responsible journalism is to check such assertions against other evidence and obtain as objective a total picture as possible. Mr. McCoy's book is replete with statements such as "according to several sources" (page 263), "village leaders . . . claim" (page 263), "According to reports later received by the U. S. Bureau of Narcotics" (page 244), "Chinese merchants in Vientiane reported that" (page 281), and others. In the enclosed annex, we have commented on our investigation of the facts behind certain of these statements. We have by no means made an exhaustive review of every such statement in the book but send these to you

in order to demonstrate our belief that your confidence that Mr. McCoy's scholarship "is beyond reproach" is not well founded.

Our difference with Mr. McCoy is no mere debate over the excellence of his scholarship. Mr. McCoy's charges against CIA, both directly and by innuendo, have been repeated by editorial writers throughout the nation and could create an accepted myth that CIA has been involved in the drug traffic. The truth is that CIA has never been involved in the drug traffic and is actively engaged in fighting against it. We believe that the effect of Mr. McCoy's book is to do a disservice to this fight and to dishearten the many sincere people in CIA who are at least as concerned about this menace as Mr. McCoy. On 14 April 1971, Mr. Helms, Director of Central Intelligence, said to the American Society of Newspaper Editors:

There is the arrant nonsense, for example, that the Central Intelligence Agency is somehow involved in the world drug traffic. We are not. As fathers, we are as concerned about the lives of our children and grandchildren as are all of you. As an Agency, in fact, we are heavily engaged in tracing the foreign roots of the drug traffic for the Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs. We hope we are helping with a solution; we know we are not contributing to the problem.

This statement remains valid today.

Sincerely,

[Redacted Signature]

Lawrence R. Houston  
General Counsel

Enclosure

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